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Myanmar Epigraphy – Current State and Future Tasks

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For U Tin Htway
(1930-2015)

From the early periods of her history, Myanmar (Burma) has been rich in inscriptions. The spread of writing may be in part attributed to Buddhism, which as a “religion of the book” required literary skills that were taught in monastic schools. It is therefore hardly astonishing to find copies from Buddhist canonical literature among the earliest writings of Myanmar. Until the end of the 19th century, palm leaf was the most common writing material;¹ other materials used for inscriptions were stone (but unlike in neighbouring India almost no copper plates exist), artefacts such as bells or religious imagery made of bronze or other metals, and lacquerware. Painted inscriptions and inscriptions written with a pencil are found on the walls of many temples, and occasionally, magic syllables or formulas were incised on the blades of swords and daggers, endowing their owners with strength and prowess.² With regard to their artistic value, the most interesting inscriptions can be found woven into the narrow ribbons that are wrapped around palm leaf manuscripts (*sa-cho*).³

The contents of these inscriptions varied almost as much as the materials they were written on. Most of them were dedicatory in nature, while some contain benedictory verses or imprecations, and others simply record the horoscope of a certain (birth-)day or indicate the name of the owner or artisan. All taken together, the total number of inscriptions from Myanmar will amount to several thousand, a number far too big to compile a list of all of them, let alone survey their contents. Research has therefore concentrated on the longer and more important inscriptions, beginning with the earliest examples from the Pyu and Bagan periods. A survey conducted in the late 19th century resulted in a list of about 1500 inscriptions in the four languages, Myanmar, Mon, Pali, and Pyu.⁴ Though this list may still serve as a first source of information, it is nowadays outdated not only because of the many inscriptions that have come to light in the meantime, but also because it was incomplete and erroneous even by the time of its first publication.

Given the number of inscriptions that would have to be considered, this survey will concentrate on the early phase of epigraphy in Myanmar before c. 1400 CE. Moreover, inscriptions in languages other than Myanmar will be treated only summarily. The article is divided into four, roughly chronologically arranged parts. Starting with an overview of

¹ Palm leaf was the usual medium for the writing down of religious texts, i.e. the Pali canon and its auxiliary texts. The colophons of these texts regularly contain a short blessing and the name of the donor(s), in addition to technical data such as to when, where and by whom the manuscript was made. For an example, see J. A. Stewart, “Burmese Dedicatory Inscription of A.D. 1683,” *BSOAS* 7, 1933-35., p. 541-544.

² An example is shown by Sylvie Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts, Past and Present*, New York 1994, p. 149.

³ For these, see Noel F. Singer, “Kammavaca Texts, their Covers and Binding Ribbons,” *Arts of Asia* 23 (3), 1993, p. 97-106.

⁴ Charles Duroiselle, *A List of Inscriptions Found in Burma*, vol. 1, Rangoon 1921. This list contains 1457 inscriptions in Myanmar (and Pali, though the passages in Pali are by and large confined to the invocation “namo tassa ...” with which Myanmar texts regularly start), 48 in Mon, 15 in Pyu, and 5 in other languages.

inscription in languages other than Myanmar, the development and the peculiarities of the epigraphy of the Bagan period will be surveyed. The subsequent section recollects the history of epigraphic research in Myanmar, highlighting surveys both commissioned by Burmese kings and those conducted by Western scholars. The tasks and prospects for future research, as emerging from the preceding sections, will conclude the article.

I. Inscriptions in languages other than Myanmar

As the Mon inscriptions will be dealt with separately in this volume, four languages remain to be considered in this section, viz. Pyu, Tamil, Pali, and Sanskrit. As the use of the latter language was mostly confined to Rakhine (Arakan), which has a separate section in this volume too, remarks on them can be kept brief here.

1. The Epigraphy of the Pyu

For a long time, the inscriptions of the Pyu people, who inhabited the central dry zone of Myanmar between c. the 3rd and the 10th centuries CE, were incomprehensible as the Pyu language could not be reconstructed. It was only with the help of the early 12th century Myazedi inscription from Bagan which records, in four languages (Pali, Myanmar, Mon and Pyu), a dedication by prince Rajakumar that a few words and the syntax of the Pyu language became known.⁵ However, research on the language and writing system of the Pyu has not much advanced beyond that point. Apparently, the Pyu inscriptions were never properly catalogued,⁶ and with a number of inscriptions having come to light in recent years, their current number is unknown. Their largest number comes from the former capital city Sri Ksetra (near Prome, now Pyay), where several huge burial urns with names and dates (c. 6th to 8th centuries CE),⁷ as well as a number of inscribed Buddhist images or altar pieces have been found. Further Pyu inscriptions come from Beikthano,⁸ from Thandoway in Rakhine,⁹ Pagan,¹⁰ Halin,¹¹ and Maingmaw, a large Pyu site in the Kyaukse district of Upper Myanmar

⁵ The seminal work in reconstructing the Pyu Language had been done by Charles O. Blagden, "A preliminary Study of the fourth Text of the Myazedi Inscriptions," *JRAS* 1911, p. 365-388, as well as idem, "The Pyu Inscriptions," *Epigraphia Indica* 12, 1913-14, p. 127-132. Building on Blagden's work is Robert Shafer, "Further Analysis of the Pyu Inscriptions," *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 7, 1942-43, p. 313-371. Of late, U Tun Aung Chain has identified few more vocabulary from recent findings: "The kings of the Hpayataung Urn Inscription," *MHRJ* 11, 2003, p. 1-14..

⁶ Though Luce dedicated two chapters to the Pyu in his *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma* (vol. 1, Oxford 1985, p. 47-60), including an overview of their epigraphy, it should be noted that this work, which was published long after his death, emerged from a series of lectures delivered in the mid-1960s. The work therefore reflects the state of research in the early 1960s. Moreover, Luce was biased towards the Mon and never paid full attention to the Pyu. For a recent re-assessment of the Pyu, see Elizabeth Moore, "Interpreting Pyu Material Culture: Royal Chronologies and Finger-marked Bricks," *MHRJ* 13, 2004, p. 1-58.

⁷ For the date of the most recent finding, see now U San Win, "The Date of the 'Hpayataung' Pyu Inscription," *Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift* 4-5, 2000-01, p. 120-125, who suggests that the dates are in the Gupta Era (of 320/321 CE) and not the Myanmar Era of 638. Even though the calendrical systems of Southeast Asia were heavily influenced by models imported from India, it seems highly unlikely that the Gupta Era, which was not even universal in the North Indian heartland of the Guptas, could have become that influential in Myanmar. As the Saka Era (of 78 CE) appears to be too early, the (Pyu-)Myanmar Era of 638 seems to be preferable at present.

⁸ Beikthano has yielded a seal with the name or title "Sanghasiri" in a late Brahmi (U Sein Maung U, "Myanma-naing-ngan-shi She-haung Kampe-tanhseik-akyo," *Tekkatho Pyinya-patetha Sa-saung* 5 (3), 1970, p. 109-127) and a votive tablet with three (presumably royal) names on the reverse (Moore, "Interpreting," p. 22). See also Janice Stargardt, *The ancient Pyu of Burma*, vol. 1, Cambridge/Singapore 1990, p. 150.

⁹ See Luce, *Phases*, vol. 1, p. 152, and vol. 2, Pl. 54.

¹⁰ Pl. V 555. For the Chinese inscription on its reverse, see Chen Yi-sein, "The Chinese Inscription at Pagan," *BBHC* 1 (2), 1960, p. 153-157.

discovered in the 1970s.¹² The inscriptions probably cover the time span from the 6th to the 13th centuries, but due to the unsatisfactory state of research this is a mere speculation. The script of the Pyu derives from the Indian Brahmi alphabet, but appears to have developed in a rather peculiar direction, easily discernible by the long shafts of the letters and the markers to identify the heavy tones. The language seems to be related to Old Myanmar, but despite this linguist relationship, the Myanmar people used Mon rather than Pyu letters when they began to write inscriptions of their own.

The most spectacular epigraphic relics from the Pyu period are undoubtedly the sets of gold folios inscribed with passages from the Pali canon. They are known as the Maunggan and Khinba-gon gold plates, after Maunggan village and the peasant U Khin Ba (“gon” simply means “mound”), in whose field the leaves were discovered.¹³ Scholars examining these texts, in particular the set from Khin Ba’s mound, have attributed them to the late 5th or early 6th century. This would make them the oldest extracts from the Pali canon.¹⁴ As the shape of the gold foils suggests, the tradition of recording Buddhist texts on palm leaf must have been well established by the time of the golden Pyu copies. Yet the texts were not meant for study or public reading but, being encased inside a stupa, served as a “dhamma relic” that substituted the corporal relic of the Buddha a stupa is supposed to contain. This function of the text is also apparent from its close link with the small silver reliquary also found in the relic chamber of the ancient stupa in Khin Ba’s field. A phrase that had been omitted from the gold leaves was supplemented on the rim of the silver casket in order to encase a relic without defect.¹⁵ In short, the significance of the Pyu inscriptions lies in the fact that they are the only remnants of an otherwise extinct language and people.¹⁶ Though the number of these inscriptions at present is perhaps too small to allow a full reconstruction of the language, it can be hoped that future surveys and excavations at the Pyu sites in Myanmar will render additional material for study and will thus enable linguists to explore in greater depth the relation between the Pyu and the Myanmar languages.

2. Inscriptions in Sanskrit and Tamil

¹¹ Two inscriptions from Halin are documented in the *Inscriptions of Burma* (Pl. IV 357a-b). Also see Luce, *Phases*, vol. 1, p. 65-66, and Moore, “Interpreting Pyu”, p. 36-37.

¹² For Maingmaw see U Than Tun, “A forgotten town of Burma,” *Shiroku* 12, 1979, p. 51-56.

¹³ The two leaves from Maunggan were edited by U Tun Nyein, “The Maunggon gold plates,” *EI* 5, 1898-99, p. 101-102. Also see Louis Finot, “Un nouveau document sur le Bouddhisme birman,” *JA* 10, 1912, p. 121-136. While Duroiselle concentrated on the reliquary of the Khin Ba trove (*ARASI* 1926-27, p. 171-183), its gold plates were fully studied by U Lu Pe Win, *Report of the Director, Archaeological Survey of Burma* 1938-39, p. 12-22. Before being re-examined on the Cambridge symposium (see next footnote), they had once again been studied in Myanmar by Daw Than Hswe, *Pyu-sa Khin-ba Shwe-pe-chat Dhat-pon-mya*, 2 vols., Yangon 1991. The second volume contains a coloured facsimile of the folios. A single leaf found in 1927 at Kyundawzu quarter, Hmawza, appears to contain an identical quotation as one of the Khinbagon leaves.

¹⁴ Janice Stargardt, “The Oldest known Pali Texts, 5th-6th century: Results of the Cambridge Symposium on the Pyu Golden Pali Text from Sri Ksetra,” *JPTS* 21, 1995, p. 199-213. For a revision of the dates, see Harry Falk, “Die Goldblätter aus Sri Ksetra,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 41, 1997, p. 53-92.

¹⁵ Janice Stargardt, *Tracing Thoughts through Things*, Amsterdam 2000, p. 28.

¹⁶ The last reference to the Pyu in Myanmar is found in an inscription from the year 872 (1510 CE) recording the construction of a new palace at Ava by king Narapati II (List 1050 = OBI 5, p. 99). Participating in the inauguration ceremony were “daughters of the Pyu” (l. 70). See U Tin Hla Thaw, “History of Burma, AD 1400-1500,” *JBRIS* 42 (2), 1959, p. 146.

If we exclude the “ye dharma ...” stanzas found on numerous votive tablets all over Burma,¹⁷ the host of Sanskrit inscriptions belongs to a dynasty of kings whose names end with *-candra*. They ruled from their capital Vesali in Rakhine (Arakan) between the 6th and the 8th century CE. The single most important inscription was left by king Anantachandra on a four-sided pillar and may be assigned to the 8th century CE.¹⁸ Styled like contemporary Indian Sanskrit inscriptions, the Anantachandra inscription starts with a long eulogy of the king and his predecessors, some of whom are also known from coins.¹⁹ Since the publication of Johnston’s pioneering study, only few more inscriptions of Chandra rulers, both on copper plate and on stone, have come to light.²⁰

Outside Rakhine, Sanskrit was hardly used in Myanmar, and only one Sanskrit inscription is known from Bagan. The massive slab, measuring approximately 2.0 by 2.2 meters, was found in 1990 while excavating the moat of Bagan. Unfortunately, a dredger used to accelerate the progress of the excavation work hit the stone and cut three large scratches diagonally across the inscribed face. Action of the water in the moat had already obliterated parts of the writing, but due to the scratches inflicted by the dredger’s bucket the inscription is now practically illegible save for a few syllables and the number of lines (34). Today, the inscription is located in a small brick shed near Bagan’s Tharaba gate.

The only Tamil inscription (in fact, it is bilingual in Sanskrit and Tamil) known from early Myanmar was also found at Myinkaba, a suburb of Bagan about a mile south of the citadel.²¹ The inscription records the construction (or perhaps the repair) of a porch (*mandapa*) at a Vishnu temple, to which subsequently a door and a lamp were donated by a South Indian merchant of the Nanadeshis (“those trading to foreign countries”). It has been assigned to the 13th century on palaeographic grounds. The section in Sanskrit (on top) is a verse from a hymn of a famous Vaishnava saint. Another undeciphered inscription in a South Indian script has been found on the walls of the Kawgun caves on the right bank of the Salween river, some 28 miles north of Moulmein (Mawlamyaing). Its date is unknown, and only the word “Paramesvara-pada” is legible.²² A few more inscriptions contain a single line or verse in Sanskrit. These include king Alaungsithu’s Shwegu inscription, the date of which (in the Shaka era) is given in Sanskrit, and Pl. IV 454 (CE 1334), which has an introductory Sanskrit verse of four lines.

¹⁷ See now Kyaw Minn Htin, “Early Buddhism in Myanmar: *Ye dhamma* Inscriptions from Arakan”, in Pierre-Yves Manguin et al. (eds.), *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-cultural Exchange*, Singapore 2011, ch. 19.

¹⁸ This inscription and two others were studied by E. H. Johnston in the 1930s and published posthumously: “Some Sanskrit Inscriptions from Arakan,” *BSOAS* 11, 1943-46, p. 357-385. See now Arlo Griffiths, “Three more Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan: New perspectives on its name, dynastic history, and Buddhist culture in the first millennium”, *Journal of Burma Studies* 19 (2), 2015, p. 281-340.

¹⁹ Cp. Pamela Gutman, “The ancient Coinage of Southeast Asia,” *JSEAS* 66 (1), 1978, p. 8-21, and Michael Mitchiner, *The Land of Water. Coinage and History of Bangladesh and later Arakan, c. 300 BC to the present day*, London 2001.

²⁰ D. C. Sircar, “Inscriptions of the Chandra Kings from Arakan,” *EI* 32, 1957, p. 103-109, and idem, “Inscriptions from East India,” *EI* 37, 1963, p. 61-66. Several more inscriptions in Nagari script from Mrohaung and Vesali were published in the annual reports of the Archaeology Department, see the *RDASB* for the years 1957 (pl. 1-2), 1959 (pl. 36-43 and p. 25-28), 1960 (pl. 16-17 and p. 36), 1964 (pl. 31-32 and p. 28-34, another copper plate) and 1965 (pl. 18 and p. 37, a “ye dharma ...” tablet).

²¹ E. Hultzsich, “A Vaishnava Inscription at Pagan,” *EI* 7, 1901-02, p. 197-198. It is uncertain if this inscription had any relation to the Nathlaung-kyaung temple, the only Vishnu temple at Pagan.

²² Gordon H. Luce and U Pe Maung Tin (comp.), *Inscriptions of Burma*, vol. IV, London 1955, Pl. 355b (hereafter cited as “Pl.” with volume and number).

In Rakhine, writing in Sanskrit ceased after the Chandras, and when inscriptions were written again probably in the 15th century - epigraphs that have occasionally been assigned to the 12th or 13th centuries should belong to this later period on palaeographic evidence – the Myanmar language was used instead of Sanskrit.²³ Overall, our present state of knowledge on Rakhine hardly allows us to make more than educated guesses on its history, art and epigraphy before the 15th century.²⁴

3. Inscriptions in Pali

In comparison to other Buddhist polities of South and Southeast Asia, early Myanmar has yielded a considerable number of inscriptions written in Pali. These range from Pyu-period extracts from the Pali Canon (below) to short prayers on clay ‘votive’ tablets through to probably a dozen lengthy inscriptions recording donations and important events. At Bagan, the use of Pali for invocations or prayers on votive tablets commenced with king Anawrahta in the 11th century, whose standard phrase stated that “this Buddha image has been made by his own hands. May he attain *nibban*”.²⁵ Pali continued to be used after c. 1100 CE, both for short prayers or blessings added to inscriptions written in Myanmar²⁶ and for the writing of elaborate, full-length inscriptions, of which at least nine examples are known. The oldest of the latter is the quadrilingual Myazedi inscription (c.1112-4 CE), followed by the Shwegu inscription of king Alaungsithu, dated 1141 CE.²⁷ After a long gap, the next Pali inscriptions date from around the mid-13th century. The first one, written in 1230 CE, was issued by an anonymous who styled himself (or herself) *danapati* (“gift bestower”),²⁸ but the other example is more important as it refers to a reform of the monks’ order (*sangha*) at Bagan in the year 1248 CE, which apparently involved monks from Cambodia and Sri Lanka. Due to

²³ The inscriptions in question are those of kings Koliya and Alomapyu. For the former, see Pamela Gutman, *Burma's lost kingdoms. Splendours of Arakan*, Bangkok 2001, p. 14 (where it is claimed that this epigraph, written in the year 1123 CE, was “the first major inscription in the Arakanese dialect of the Burmese language”). For the latter, see Catherine Raymond, “Étude des relations religieuses entre le Sri Lanka et l’Arakan du XII^e au XVIII^e siècle: Documentation historique et évidences archéologiques,” *JA* 282 (2), 1995, p. 469-501 (engl. version “Religious and scholarly exchanges between the Sinhalese sangha and the Arakanese and Burmese Theravadin communities: Historical documentation and physical evidence,” in Om Prakash/Denys Lombard (eds.), *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800*, Delhi 1999, p. 87-105). I have relied on the evidence of these authors in my article “Coastal Peripheries during the Pagan Period,” in Jos Gommans/Jacques Leider (eds.), *The Maritime Frontiers of Burma*, Leiden 2002, p. 59-78 (esp. p. 71-73). But see the review of Gutman in *Internationales Asienforum* (34 (1-2), 2003, p. 176-7) where I raised doubts about the age of the inscription. U Nyein Maung, the compiler of OBI, also published them in the 4th volume, which covers the 14th and 15th centuries (Archaeology Dept., (ed.), *She-haung Myanma Kyauksa-mya*, vol. 4, Yangon 1998, p. 156).

²⁴ For the subsequent periods, there are now several new studies, most notably the theses of Jacques Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan (Birmanie), son histoire politique entre le début du X^e et la fin du XVII^e siècle*, Paris 2004, and of Michael Charney, *Where Jambudipa and Islam converged: Religious Change and the Emergence of Buddhist Communalism in early modern Arakan (15th to 19th centuries)*, Ann Arbor (Ph.D. Thesis) 1999.

²⁵ Cp. U Mya, *Votive Tablets of Burma*, 2 vols, Rangoon 1961; Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma – Early Pagan*, 3 vols, Locust Valley 1969-70.

²⁶ Pl. V 568d is another votive tablet, found in the vicinity of Yangon, bearing an inscription in Pali. For its text, see N. R. Ray, *Theravada Buddhism in Burma*, Calcutta 1932, p. 147. For translations of Pls. I 91, I 94 and IV 375, where prince *Rajasu* describes his descent, and of Pl. II 226, a eulogy of the Sinhalese monk *Ananda*, see Tilman Frasch, *Pagan, Stadt und Staat*, Stuttgart 1996, p. 115 and p. 294-295. Other inscriptions with longer passages in Pali (usually invocations or prayers) are e.g. Pl. I 61, Pl. I 102 and Pl. II 193.

²⁷ Gordon H. Luce/ U Pe Maung Tin, “The Shwegugyi Pagoda Inscription, Pagan, 1141 A.D.,” *JBRs* 10 (2), 1920, p. 67-74 (a correction of the date in *ibid.* 32 (3), 1932, p. 151); idem, “Inscriptions of Burma, edited and translated,” *BBHC* 1 (1), 1960, p. 1-32. The main theme of this inscription is a praise of the bliss of *nibban*.

²⁸ Pl. I 65a-b (*She-haung*, vol. 1, Yangon 1972, p. 215-216 = List 209-210). Its reverse contains a Burmese translation of the same text.

its poor state of preservation, this inscription is difficult to decipher and has only allowed unsatisfactory readings so far.²⁹ Its place of origin, the area around Bagan's Dhammayazika stupa, where many Sinhalese and other foreign monks resided during the 12th and 13th centuries, has recently provided two more Pali inscriptions, of which one possibly dates from the year 1271 CE.³⁰ Mergui and Bassein, two port cities of Lower Myanmar, have also yielded one fragmentary Pali inscription each, so little can be said about their contents.³¹ These inscriptions seem to indicate that Pali was used as a *lingua franca* on occasions when monks from the Theravada *ecumene* (notably Sri Lanka and Cambodia) were addressed or involved in the affairs recorded.³² For their bearing on Pali language and a cosmopolitan Buddhist culture, these inscriptions deserve further research.

The most important Pali inscription from post-Bagan Myanmar is arguably the Kalyani inscription. It was commissioned by king Dhammaceti of Bago (Pegu) in 1479 CE to record the reform of the *sangha* carried out with the help of monks from Sri Lanka. Again, the text was recorded in two languages, Pali and Mon.³³ In its introduction to the reform, the inscription gives an outline of the history of (Theravada) Buddhism in Myanmar, with a strong emphasis on the role played by Lower Myanmar. Despite its bias, the Kalyani inscription became a kind of official "church history" for the whole of Myanmar by the early 18th century (at the?) latest, when U Kala used it for his "Great Chronicle". The Kalyani inscription thus became the central source for the early history of Buddhism in Myanmar. The religious reform of king Dhammaceti was part of a wider movement in Theravada Buddhism in the course of the 15th century, which seems to have brought about a revival of Pali literature all over mainland Southeast Asia.³⁴

II. Myanmar Inscriptions

Of Mongolian stock, the ethnic Burmans very likely migrated into their present homeland, probably in several waves, the last of which may have arrived in Burma as late as the 8th or 9th century CE. On entering the plains of Central Burma, the Burmans encountered the Pyu people – possibly their distant cousins (see above) – whose achievements they took over: agriculture and irrigation, architecture and possibly the Buddha's teachings as well. The

²⁹ Pl. III 302 (*She-haung* 2, p. 235 = List 1323). The version in OBI for instance misreads the date in lines 15-16 ("dvanavutyatike sattasahassana ...", which is the year 1792 of the Buddhist calendar or 1248 CE). For further remarks, see Gordon H. Luce/U Tin Htway, "A Fifteenth Century Inscription and Library at Pagan," *Malalasekara Commemoration Volume*, ed. O. H. de A. Wijesinha, Colombo 1976, p. 207-208.

³⁰ For some remarks (though not always correct) on it, see Hema Goonatilake, "Sri Lanka—Myanmar Historical Relations in Religion, Culture and Polity", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 55, 2009, S. 95.

³¹ Pl. IV 345b and Pl. V 548a.

³² See Tilman Frasch, "Konzile, Kontakte, Kontroversen: Begegnungen in der Theravada-Kosmopolis", in Oliver Freiberger und Christoph Klein (eds.), *Begegnungen mit dem Anderen*, Göttingen (to be published). The author is currently preparing a survey of the Pali inscriptions from the Pagan period.

³³ Taw Sein Ko, *A Preliminary Study of the Kalyani Inscriptions of Dhammaceti, 1476 AD*, Bombay 1892. The Mon text of the inscription was edited by Charles O. Blagden, *EI* 3 (2), 1932, p. 1-110. The reconstruction of both versions was only possible with the help of copies preserved on palm leaves.

³⁴ For this movement, which emerged in the context of the end of the second millennium according to the Buddhist calendar (i.e. 1456 CE), see now Tilman Frasch, "The Theravada Buddhist Ecumene in the 15th Century: Intellectual Foundations and Material Representations", in Tansen Sen (ed.), *Buddhism across Asia. Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, vol. 1, Singapore/Delhi: ISEAS/Manohar, 2014, p. 347-367. For another 15th century dedicatory inscription in Pali, see Noel F. Singer, "The Gold Relics of Bana Thau," *Arts of Asia* 22 (5), 1992, p. 75-84 (esp. p. 79).

alphabet for writing the Myanmar language, however, was borrowed from their southern neighbours, the Mons. The interaction between the latter and the Burmans was later portrayed as a kind of culture clash, as the first king of Pagan, Anawrahta, is credited with the conquest of several Mon settlements in Lower Myanmar, in particular the city of Thaton. In fact, there may have been much peaceful intercourse and exchange in the centuries preceding the rise of Pagan than this stereotyped version of a century-long ethnic conflict.

It took the Burmans considerable time and effort to express their mother tongue with the script they had adapted. Instead of Myanmar, they used Pali or Mon for their earliest inscriptions, the short prayers scribbled on the back of votive tablets. The oldest Myanmar words possibly appear on a set of some sixty votive tablets recovered from a mound near the Ananda temple at Bagan. Inscribed on the reverse of these tablets are the names of flowers, fruits and herbs, all spelt in a very archaic language that can provisionally be dated to the late 11th or early 12th century.³⁵ Approximately contemporary to these votive tablets is the already mentioned Myazedi inscription in four languages, written by prince Rajakumar in 1112 CE or shortly thereafter. It has been suggested that its original text was composed in Mon, from which the other three versions were translated, though it seems also possible that a person of learning (i.e., a monk) would use Pali for the *Urtext* and then translate it into the vernaculars. As the oldest dated inscription in the Myanmar language, the Myazedi inscription has repeatedly attracted scholarly investigation.³⁶

Few more Myanmar inscriptions possibly belonging to the first half of the 12th century notwithstanding,³⁷ writing in Myanmar remained a rather exclusive affair before the end of the 12th century. This began to change from the reign of king Narapatisithu (c. 1174-1211 CE), and after c. 1220, when the bulk of inscriptions from the Bagan period was written, writing in Myanmar had become the rule. The decline of Bagan at the end of the 13th century, in contrast, had no significant impact upon the writing of inscriptions, as their production remained on a high level throughout the 14th and 15th centuries.

1. Stone inscriptions

Some 750 inscriptions are at present known from the Bagan period (c. 1050 to 1300 CE),³⁸ the majority of which recording the construction and endowment of a religious building. Such

³⁵ Pls. V 604-606, are a selection of about 50 tablets. The inscriptions were read by Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma – Early Pagan*, vol. 2, p. 31-39, Locust Valley 1969, as well as idem, “Economic Life of the Early Burman,” *JBR* 30, 1940, p. 310-315. Also see U Tin Htway, “How Burma’s literatures began,” in *Nanavidhaikata. Festschrift für Hermann Berger*, Wiesbaden 1996, p. 259-260.

³⁶ E.g. Cultural Institute (ed.), *The Myazedi Inscription in Four Languages*, Rangoon 1960.

³⁷ Most notably Pl. III 303, the undated reverse of a dedication in which the merit of the pious deed is shared with other beings. For a presentation of the inscriptions from the 12th century known until the mid-1960s, see Luce, *Old Burma* 1, p. 104-116, though this list is now incomplete and outdated.

³⁸ The author is currently compiling a new list of inscription from Burma before 1300 CE, which contains about 750 entries including about 100 undated fragments. To give a more precise number of original inscriptions from the Pagan period is however difficult: Firstly, it is hard to distinguish “original” inscriptions from “close copies”, made at any time from the 14th to the 18th century. Secondly, sometimes two or more dedications are written on one stone, which can be counted separately or together. Thirdly, in a wider sense, a complete list of inscriptions would have to include the many glosses that accompany the wall paintings of Pagan. Save for few selected temples, these glosses have never been properly recorded, e.g. U Ba Shin, *The Lokahteikpan. Early Burmese Culture in a Pagan Temple*, Rangoon 1962, or Gordon H. Luce/U Ba Shin/Kenneth Whitbread, “Pagan Wetkyi-in Kubyaukkyi, an early Burmese Temple with Ink Glosses,” *AA* 33 (3), 1971, p. 167-218.

dedicatory inscriptions are highly formulaic. Usually, they open with a short invocation such as “*namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*” or simply “*namo buddhayam*”. Then comes, almost without fail, the date, which is usually given in the Myanmar Era (aka Culasakkaraj, CS) commencing in 638 CE. While in a single instance the Śaka Era of 78 CE was used,³⁹ dates in the Buddhist Era of 544 BC are more frequent, often alongside with (though rarely instead of) the Myanmar Era. The number of the year is corroborated according to a twelve-year cycle of names (curiously, these are the names of the twelve months of the Indian calendar), followed by the month, the phase of the moon, and finally the number and name of the day. Occasionally the constellation (*nakshatra*) or the hour of the day are mentioned as well.⁴⁰

Next, the donor introduces himself or herself (though some donors preferred to stay anonymous) and explains the motive for his deed. In the disposition, which comes next, the material content of the dedication is recorded: the buildings and works of art normally come first, followed by the fields, serfs, articles of daily use in a monastery and whatever valuables donated. These are regularly mentioned in detail: for instance, the boundaries of the fields (more common in the later part of the 13th century, though) or the way these had been acquired, as well as the names and even age of the serfs are meticulously put on record. In fact, several inscriptions contain hardly more than a long list of names of serfs, besides the date and the name of the donor. In conclusion of this section of the epigraph, donors would sometimes confirm the donations listed and name the witnesses of the deed. The final lines usually contain a highly standardized formula for the sharing of the merit with well-wishers and an imprecation aimed at those who violate or destroy the dedication.⁴¹

Such dedicatory inscriptions form the majority of the epigraphs from the Bagan period, but there are a few examples written for a different purpose. One group can be termed as ‘legal inscriptions’, because it records the settlement of a legal dispute, usually in connection with the rededication of the property (serfs or land) by the winning party. In a few rare cases, the proceedings of a legal dispute are written down without an obvious reference to a subsequent donation.⁴² A second group can be classified as “civil contracts”, in which villagers recorded an agreement obviously without any other official administrative institution being involved. This latter type is however extremely rare.⁴³ These two types of legal inscriptions form a crucial body of information for the legal system and its underlying maxims at Bagan, the

³⁹ For the date of king Alaungsithu’s Shwegu-gyi inscription (Pl. I 1-2), see U Pe Maung Tin, “The Saka Era in Burma,” *JBR* 22 (3), 1932, p. 151.

⁴⁰ The time may have been important for two reasons. Either the exact moment had been determined as auspicious by a *bedin-saya* (soothsayer) or brahmin astrologer, or it was for the more practical reason that the inauguration of a temple took place when the rays of the sun fell on its main Buddha image, producing a natural golden colour. This effect can still be seen in many Pagan temples at sunrise.

⁴¹ For the imprecations and benedictions, see Gordon H. Luce, “Prayers of Ancient Burma,” *JBR* 26 (2), 1936, p. 131-138. Although these formulas were much standardized, writers would occasionally let their imagination run free and elaborate the imprecation, thus producing a quite funny and entertaining finale for the modern reader. Possibly the elaboration reflects influence from India, where such imprecations are frequently met with in the copper plates contemporary to Pagan.

⁴² For instance Pl. II 117 (= OBI 1, p. 64 = List 380a), Pl. IV 371a (= OBI 1, p. 128 = List 1353), Pl. IV 381 (= OBI 3, p. 14) or Pl. V 598a. For the latter, cp. U Than Tun, “Supplementary Note to the Legal System in Burma, 1000-1300,” *Burma Law Institute Journal* 1 (2), 1959, p. 184.

⁴³ Pl. I 55a (= OBI 1, p. 183), records the distribution of village duties by the headman and his son (1225 CE). OBI 1, p. 189 apparently settled the financial contributions that several villagers had to make towards a pilgrimage to India and Sri Lanka (1226 CE). Pl. III 264 (= OBI 3, p. 131) records a land transaction.

value of which can hardly be overestimated. Unfortunately, most of these inscriptions are fragmentary, obliterated or else defective and thus present a major problem for research. The recording of legal disputes on stone by and large ceased with the end of the Bagan period. A third type of stone inscriptions were again religious in nature but did not record a donation. Well-known examples for this type are the Kalyani inscriptions mentioned above, which commemorate a reform of the *sangha*, and the stones in the compound of the Kuthodaw temple at Mandalay, which contain an authorised version of the Buddhist canon as edited in the early 1870s. Two such records are known from the Bagan period. One is the Pali inscription from the year 1248 CE mentioned above; another unique example, from the provincial town of Sale, records the *paritta* (a kind of prayer or well-wishing text) preached by a local nun.⁴⁴

2. Inked (painted) inscriptions

The second largest group are inscriptions painted with ink on temple walls. Among them are a few dedicatory inscriptions, whose structure follows closely that of the stone inscriptions. Where ink inscriptions were written at Bagan, they normally replace stone inscriptions, but in some exceptional cases, two versions exist on stone and in ink.⁴⁵ Two examples from the 12th century⁴⁶ show that the tradition of writing on the walls started relatively early and continued throughout the Pagan period.⁴⁷ The restoration work carried out at Bagan since the early 1990s has brought to light a few new ink inscriptions, for instance the one in the main temple of the Shwenanyindaw complex.⁴⁸ After the construction of new monuments at Pagan ceased around 1300, repairs and renovations became were frequently recorded on the walls of the temple concerned,⁴⁹ and occasionally ink inscriptions provided an easy and cheap way to re-record – or even fake – donations long after the alleged date, as indicated by their ‘modern’ spellings.⁵⁰ These donative ink inscriptions are still insufficiently studied. They are hardly ever recorded in the “Old Burmese Inscriptions”, and besides the few examples reproduced in the *Inscriptions of Burma*, U Ba Shin’s monograph is the only major study available.⁵¹

⁴⁴ OBI 2, p. 205 (CE 1198).

⁴⁵ Parts of the Dhammayazika inscription (Pl. I 19-20) were copied in the porches of the temples attached to this stupa (Pl. IV 368b and Pl. IV 369b). A copy of Pl. I 90 was painted inside the Zeyyathut temple at Minnanthu (Charles Duroiselle, *A List of Inscriptions found in Burma*, Rangoon 1921, nos. 230 and 234). Similarly, Pls. IV 388b and 421 are duplicates.

⁴⁶ The two are from the Baruci temple (Pl. IV 367b, cp. Luce, *Old Burma*, vol. 1, p. 388) and the Alopyi temple (Pl. IV 367a).

⁴⁷ Pl. IV 377 by king Narapati’s queen Caw Ahlun at the Dhammayazika stupa (1197 CE); Pl. III 372 from Yatsauk temple (1222 CE), or Pl. III 247 from the Tayokpye-gu (1248 CE). A later example from 1335 CE is the inscription inside the Thitsawadi temple, see U Ba Shin, *Pagan-min-sa-su Thutesana Leik-ngan*, Rangoon 1964, p. 98-99.

⁴⁸ This inscription has not been documented anywhere as far as I can see. It has suffered considerably from rain water which intruded after the vault of the temple had collapsed. Judged by its palaeography, the inscription probably dates from the 14th century.

⁴⁹ E.g. List 801, an inscription in the vestibule of the Hgetpyittaung temple (no. 176 of Pichard’s *Inventory*) recording the repair of the image carried out in CS 762 (1400 CE).

⁵⁰ One such case can be found in temple no. 1622 (of Pichard’s *Inventory*), supposed to date from the late 12th century. Another example is found inside the Mahabodhi temple and attributes the construction of this monument to king Nadaungmya (List 1286).

⁵¹ U Ba Shin, *Pagan-min-sa-su Thutesana Leik-ngan*, Rangoon 1964. More recently U Kyaw, “Pugam minsā hnin nayan-pangyi-mya-hma Puagna-khet dhale”, in *Myanma rhe-haung thamaing ahta-ahtha thutethana satan-mya*, ed. by Min. of Culture, Dept of Archaeology and National Museums, Yangon 2010, p. 169-200. A number of them is shown and read by Hideo Sawada, *Stone and Ink Inscriptions of Burmese Script*

The largest number of ink inscriptions found at Pagan, however, are not donative records but glosses accompanying wall paintings. Again, the language of these glosses was initially Mon,⁵² but in the course of the 12th century, Mon was gradually replaced with the Myanmar language. The paintings usually depict episodes from the previous existences of the Buddha (Jatakas), and events from his life or the history of Buddhism as recorded for instance in the Sinhalese chronicles. The accompanying glosses are usually short, as spectators would be familiar with the scenes depicted. They rarely contain more than the title of the story, its number and the identification of the Buddha. Only in very few cases would a gloss comprise more than one sentence and tell the story in greater detail.⁵³ Because of their bearing on early Mon and Burmese philology, these glosses have received much attention.⁵⁴ The tradition of attaching short explanatory glosses to the paintings on the walls of religious monuments persisted until the 18th century, as the Ananda Ok-kyauing at Pagan and the Powin Taung caves illustrate.⁵⁵

The last group of ink inscriptions to be mentioned here are the horoscopes (*jatabon*), which can be found on the walls of several temples at Pagan and elsewhere. Written to record the exact birth date of a person, they consist of a circle divided into twelve segments, to which figures are added to indicate the constellation of the occasion. Sometimes, a short inscription complements the horoscope stating the name of the newborn child besides the date.⁵⁶ Although omens and constellations play an important role in Burmese life, these horoscopes were not painted to the walls of the Pagan temples before the late 13th century.⁵⁷ Whether this is an indication of the deteriorating political control at the city remains to be seen; but generally the value of the horoscopes is limited as they furnish nothing but exact dates and constellations that allow the synchronization of the Myanmar and Christian calendars.⁵⁸

3. Inscriptions on images and bells

Inscriptions on images and sculptures are a somewhat special case as they are not only relatively rare throughout Myanmar history, but also very brief as the limited space of the artefact hardly allows for more than a date and a short prayer. Even the name of the donor is

<http://www.aa.tufs.ac.jp/~sawadah/ODSEAS/burmcont-e.html> [acc. 21 Feb 2016]. The Pali ink inscriptions inside the Thambula temple were read by Daw Tin Tin Myint, *Buddhawin Pali Minsa-mya*, Yangon: Universities' Press, 1981.

⁵² See Gordon H. Luce/U Ba Shin, "Pagan Myinkaba Kubyaukkyi Temple of Rajakumar and the Old Mon Writings on its Walls," *BBHC* 2, 1961, p. 277-416.

⁵³ See for instance the glosses in temple no. 585, a small 13th century monument north of Minnanthu village near Pagan: Claudine Bautze-Picon, *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan*, Bangkok 2003, p. 59-61.

⁵⁴ In addition to the works mentioned in the previous footnotes, mention must be made of G. H. Luce, U Ba Shin and Kenneth Whitbread, "Pagan Wetkyi-in Kubyauk-kyi, an early Burmese Temple with Ink Glosses," *AA* 33 (3), 1971, p. 167-218; U Ba Shin, *The Lokatheikpan*; Charles Duroiselle, "The Talaing Plaques on the Ananda," *Epigraphia Birmanica* 2 (1-2), 1920, *passim*.

⁵⁵ Klaus Wenk, *Murals in Burma*, vol. 1 (*Paintings from Pagan of the Late Period, 18th century*), Zurich 1977, and U Tin Lwin, "Ananda Brick Monastery Inscriptions of Pagan," *JBRs* 49, 1976, p. 101-120. Christophe Munier and U Myint Aung, *Burmese Buddhist Murals*, vol. 1 (*Epigraphic Corpus of the Powin Taung Caves*), Bangkok 2007. For an overview of wall paintings in Burma see Alexandra Green, "Deep Change? Burmese Wall Paintings from the 11th to the 19th Centuries," *JBS* 10, 2005/06, p. 1-50.

⁵⁶ For a study of the horoscopes and their contribution to the synchronization of the Burmese and Christian calendars, see J. Chris Eade, "Astronomical Inscriptions at Pagan: A Computer Analysis," *BEFEO* 81, 1994, p. 269-292, and *idem*, *The Calendrical Systems of Mainland Southeast Asia*, Leiden 1995.

⁵⁷ The earliest example seems to be Pl. V 609a, dated CS 658 (1296 CE).

⁵⁸ The Universities' Historical Research Centre has recorded almost 10.000 ink inscriptions, of which 4.709 are horoscopes. See U Tun Aung Chain, "The Value of Myanmar Traditional Texts," *MHRJ* 1, 1995, p. 281.

frequently omitted. So far, dated Buddha images from Myanmar have not been surveyed systematically, despite the relevance the data of such a survey would have for art historians, and the overview presented here can at best throw a few spotlights on selected images. Few inscribed Buddha images are known from the Bagan period.⁵⁹ One set of thirteen stone figures, perhaps from the 13th century, bear the name “Dhammavilasa Mahadhe”, who is either the donor or the person for whom they were made.⁶⁰ The earliest dated image known to date, identified as Anomadassi Buddha, was cast in the year 1293 CE. The identification suggests that the image must have been part of a series of presumably twenty-eight Buddhas.⁶¹ Further dated images come from the late 15th century. Two were found in Rakhine; a third and more intriguing one originates from Tanta-U in central Myanmar. As the inscription on this latter piece reveals, it was cast in CS 853 (1491 CE) as the pious deed of a Saw Phwa, presumably a queen.⁶² After 1500, the number of inscribed images increases,⁶³ though they still represent a small fraction of all images produced. A noteworthy example from this period is a 17th century bronze image which was “made on Wednesday, 10th day waxing of month Tazaungmon in the year 1005 (1643 CE) as the meritorious deed of Bon-thi and his wife Chit Yin”.⁶⁴

Bells formed an important part of religious life in Myanmar as borne out by frequent epigraphic references as well as material remains such as pillars to carry the crossbeam from which a bell could be hung. The tradition of inscribing bells also started in the Pagan period, though only one example has survived. Its short dedicatory inscription states that a certain *Amanga* had offered the bell to the monk from the Ratana Stupa in the monastery of Tamalinda therā, one of the foreign monks residing at Bagan.⁶⁵ As in the case of the images, the tradition of inscribing bells became more frequent after the Bagan period, and with the bells growing in size, these inscriptions could become more elaborate. Among the famous examples are king Bayinnaung’s bell hung in front of the palace at Bago, which, according to its inscription, could be rung by anyone who wanted to report a case of injustice.⁶⁶ A similar idea is expressed in an inscription on a bell cast in 1622 CE, which was subsequently removed twice; first to Mrohaung in Arakan in 1634 and then to Aligarh after the first Anglo-Burmese War.⁶⁷ Two prominent examples of inscribed bells from the 18th and the 19th

⁵⁹ Probably, the tradition of inscribing Buddha images goes back to the pre-Bagan period. Images with (partly obliterated) inscriptions in Mon, Pyu and Pali are recorded in Luce, *Old Burma – Early Pagan*, vol. 2, p. 177, 180, and p. 204. Another image from the Bagan period is referred to in Haskia Hasson, *Ancient Buddhist Art from Burma*, Singapore 1993, p. 63.

⁶⁰ ARASI 1930-34, p. 179.

⁶¹ John Guy, “A dated Buddha of the Pagan Period,” in *Indian Art and Connoisseurship* (Douglas Barrett Fel. Vol.), ed. by John Guy, Middleton 1995, p. 163-186.

⁶² RDASB 1962-63, p. 23.

⁶³ For a similar development in Thailand, see A. B. Griswold, *Dated Buddha Images of Northern Thailand*, Ascona 1957. This again may have been the result of the emergence of a Theravada Buddhist ecumene in the second half of the 15th century, as mentioned above.

⁶⁴ Charles Duroiselle, “Excavations at Pagan,” ARASI 1927-1928, p. 126-127 and Pl. 53b. Also see J. T. Bailey, “Some 17th Century Images from Burma,” *Artibus Asiae* 33 (3), 1971, p. 219-227. For another 17th century image with a much shorter inscription, see her “Addendum to some 17th Century Images from Burma,” *Artibus Asiae* 48 (1-2), 1987, p. 79-88.

⁶⁵ RDASB (Charles Duroiselle) 1937-38, p. 7-8. See Luce, *Old Burma*, vol. 2, p. 209.

⁶⁶ U Sein Myint, “The Bell Inscription of Bayinnaung (Hsinpyushin Mintayagyi),” *MHRJ* 8, 2001, p. 7-28.

⁶⁷ The text was first published by Lt. Wroughton, “Restoration and Translation of the Inscription on the large Arrracan Bell now at Adrohigat Zillah, Alligarh,” *JASB* 1837. Also see C. O. Blagden and U Pe Maung Tin,

centuries can be inspected on the platform of the Shwedagon stupa at Yangon. The smaller bell, called Mahagandha, was commissioned by king Hsinpyushin but completed only after the king's death.⁶⁸ The other one was cast by king Tharrawaddy on the occasion of his pilgrimage to the site in 1841 CE. At 42 tons, this bell weighed almost twice as much as the one made by his predecessor.⁶⁹ Collections of bells from various historical periods, some with inscriptions, can be found almost any temple compound across Myanmar, for instance the Shwezigon stupa at Bagan or the Shwehsandaw at Pyi (Prome).⁷⁰

III. The History and State of Epigraphic Research in Myanmar

Research in Myanmar epigraphy can be broadly subdivided into four phases. During the first phase, which ended around c. 1800, surveys were carried out on the orders of Burmese kings, mainly for religious and administrative reasons. The second phase began in the 19th century when the Government of India commissioned the Archaeological Survey to do systematic research. The third phase, lasting from about 1920 to the mid-1960s, was dominated by two scholars, Gordon H. Luce and U Pe Maung Tin, who cooperated in studying epigraphy at the newly founded Rangoon University and, after WW 2, in the Burma Historical Commission. Since then, research was continued by state departments, initially by the Archaeology Department and more recently by the Department of Historical Research, both under the Myanmar Ministry of Culture.

1) Research in the pre-colonial period

Though a re-examination of donative records seems to have taken place as early as the 14th century,⁷¹ two major epigraphic surveys took place in the first half of the 16th and at the end of the 18th centuries. Both were conducted under royal orders – by Thalun Min in the former case, and by Badon Min (aka Bodawpaya) in the latter – and both were quite similar in scope and purpose. Thus, they can hardly be regarded as epigraphic surveys in a narrow sense as the primary aim of both kings was to single out and distinguish lands and serfs owned by religious institutions from those in secular ownership. By reconfirming (and sometimes rededicating) former donations, the kings could display their status as just kings and acquire religious merit in accordance with what the original donors had stipulated in their

“Talaing Inscription on a Bell cast by Anauppet-lun Min,” *JBR* 18 (1), 1928, p. 21-34, and, for a translated passage, U Tun Aung Chain, “The Value,” p. 280.

⁶⁸ See G. H. Hough, “Translation of an Inscription on the Great Bell of Rangoon,” *Asiatick Researches*, 16, 1831, p. 270-283. Parts of the text are also in Sylvie Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Arts and Crafts*, New York 1994, p. 133.

⁶⁹ The bell cast by King Singu became a national monument after the Burmese succeeded to retrieve it from the Rangoon river into which it had been accidentally dropped when the British tried to carry it off as booty after the First Anglo-Burmese War. See Richard C. Temple, “The Recovery of the Great Bell from the Shwedagon Pagoda at Rangoon,” *Indian Antiquary* 57, 1926, p. 192-194.

⁷⁰ The latter collection has been catalogued by U Naing Win, *Pyi Shwe-hsan-daw-zedi-hma Kaung-laung-sa-mya*, Yangon: Archaeology Dept., 2011.

⁷¹ U Than Tun (ed./tr.), *The Royal Orders of Burma*, vol. 10, Kyoto 1989, p. 44 (introduction) and p. 33 (text), with reference to Pl. V 521.

benedictions (see above). At the same time, of course, the kings acquired vital information on taxable fields and serviceable men within their kingdoms.⁷²

King Thalun (1629-1648 CE) held an inquest of land ownership shortly becoming king. On 18 November 1630, he ordered to collect all records of religious institutions, written on stone, palm leaf or paper (*parabaik*), in order to find out the exact boundaries of the lands dedicated by former kings since the time of king Thadomin-pya (1364-1368 CE). If no records existed, the courtiers were to enquire among the village folk and monks and record their findings.

Ultimately, each record had to be copied for the royal archives, and boundary stones were to be erected wherever found missing.⁷³ This order was repeated several times, and every time the scope of the survey was widened. Thus, on 30 May 1635, the king referred his clerks to lands that had been given to spirit shrines, and in April and November 1637 he demanded updated lists of people in the service of a monastery, including their descendants. Finally, on 4 March 1638, the king repeated his order to copy all documents for the royal archives. The chronicles do not mention this survey,⁷⁴ though it may have resulted in some of the copies the subsequent surveyors assembled at Amarapura.

That survey, which was of much greater consequence for epigraphic research in Myanmar, is also much better documented. In November 1784, king Badon Min demanded the collection of any old record in Upper Myanmar in order to find out the exact boundaries of land owned by Buddhist monasteries and temples. The man put in charge was the king's former preceptor U Tun Nyo, who is also known by the position he held at the time, Twin-thin Taikwun Mahasithu. Born in 1726 in a village near Monywa (Chindwin district), U Tun Nyo was properly educated in the local monastery and became famous as an author of classical poetry (*pyo*) while still a monk. In 1752, he left the monastery to help the future king Alaungpaya regain the capital city Ava from the Lower Myanmar rebels, and the king in turn made him preceptor of prince Badon Min. When king Badon Min put him in charge of the epigraphic survey, U Tun Nyo carried it out with rigour and diligence. Not being satisfied with having only copied texts at his disposal, he had more than 700 inscription stones transferred to the compound of the Singyo Shwegu temple at Amarapura, the new capital city.⁷⁵

In compliance with the king's wish to reconfirm and if necessary re-dedicate fields that had been donated by former kings, U Tun Nyo and his team copied a good number of 'royal inscriptions' and placed them inside the compound of the Mahamuni temple at Mandalay.⁷⁶ These copies are easy to recognize, because they were incised on white marble (or alabaster) and use modern spellings in a neat round script. They also share an identical format: The

⁷² While western scholars have put the economic side effects of these surveys, Burmese kings unanimously emphasized their intention to make merit by protecting or restoring monastic landholdings.

⁷³ U Than Tun, *Royal Orders of Burma*, vol. 1, Kyoto 1981, p. 32.

⁷⁴ See Victor Lieberman, *The Administration of Burma. Cycles of Anarchy and Conquest, c.1580 - 1760*, Princeton 1984. Possibly, Myanmar's foremost historian U Kala, who wrote his "Great Chronicle" (*Mahayazawin-gyi*) at Ava less than a century after king Thalun's survey, profited from the information thus collected at the capital, even though he does not mention the survey in his work.

⁷⁵ For an introduction on the work of the surveyors, see Daw Yi Yi, "Mahamuni Kyauksa-su", *Union of Burma Journal of Literary and Social Sciences* 1 (3), 1968, p. 555-592. After its rediscovery by Taw Sein Ko in 1905, the collection was first relocated to the Patodawgyi temple at Mandalay and later to its final location, an inscription shed inside Mandalay Palace.

⁷⁶ Years ago, the Archaeology Department of Mandalay started to edit these inscriptions: *Mandalay Mahamuni Tantaing-atwin shi-so Kyauksa-mya*, vol. 1, Mandalay 1989; vols. 2-3, Yangon 2006.

original dedication, often with detailed of the fields, is bracketed between an introductory eulogy of king Badon and a concluding merit-sharing formula.

Yet any research on the way the surveyors proceeded with their task is complicated due to the number of copies on stone they left behind. For several of the inscriptions, three (or even four) copies exist: the original stone (sometimes left *in situ* at the original site), the final copy or “Mahamuni version”, easily recognizable by the white marble on which it is incised, and a third copy. The use of stone for this third copy is hard to explain. It seems clear that the surveyors strove to collect the original versions for the transfer to Amarapura, even if this risked damage to or loss of the stone. This can be seen from a fragmented inscription, the bottom part of which has remained *in situ* when the upper part was transported to Amarapura.⁷⁷ Moreover, a chance find of some twenty-five original inscriptions, made in 1961 when digging a trench along a road between Mandalay and Amarapura, confirms that a large number of inscription stones were moved.⁷⁸ In that case, to leave a stone copy behind at the original find spot, as in the case of king Nadaungmya’s Khemawara inscription,⁷⁹ would make sense. But why did the surveyors then leave some original inscriptions *in situ*, while several of the third copies were apparently made at Amarapura? And why did they prefer the cumbersome method of transporting stones across the kingdom instead of using for example palm leaf?⁸⁰

King Badon’s epigraphic survey had yet another outcome. When U Tun Nyo informed the king that the data gathered from inscriptions did not agree with statements found in earlier chronicles – notably U Kala’s “Great Chronicle”, written about 70 years earlier – he was sanctioned to compile a new chronicle. “There are earlier chronicles which do not agree with the inscriptions. Therefore the king encouraged me to write a new history, using inscriptions, poetry (mawgun, pyo) and the like, which removes conflicting statements and amends what is missing”,⁸¹ he wrote in the preface to the “New Chronicle” (*Yazawin-thit*), a comprehensive critique of Burmese chronicle tradition on the basis of independent sources. But U Tun Nyo seems to have been ahead of his time, as his “New Chronicle” never gained official recognition. Rather, the next king Bagyidaw appointed a historical commission to write a standard history of Myanmar, which became known as the “Glass Palace Chronicle”. The compilers of this chronicle based their work on U Kala and rejected U Tun Nyo’s history wherever possible.

2. Epigraphic research under the colonial government

⁷⁷ List 64 (A, p. 26; dated CS 502 or 1140 CE) was found among the many fragments left at the Singyo temple when the collection was moved to Mandalay. The stone is now lost. Pl. V 562a, a stone coming from Wunpadwe village (Kyaukse district), is probably the lower part of this fragment, as suggested by the relatively small number of letters in each line and the name of prince So Min Hla which occurs in both fragments.

⁷⁸ See *Report of the Director, Archaeology Department*, 1962-63, Rangoon 1963, p. 27-30. The stones were probably left on the spot after the bullock cart had broken down.

⁷⁹ Pl. I 31. Cp. Tilman Frisch, “King Nadaungmya’s Great Gift,” in *Études birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot*, réunis par Pierre Pichard et François Robinne, Paris 1998, p. 27-35. Since the publication of that article, further copies from Mandalay have come to my attention, which are even harder to explain.

⁸⁰ The two collections of inscriptions on palm leaf held by the British Library (Or 3434 and 3435) were commissioned by Arthur Phayre in 1885, see Patricia Herbert, “Sir Arthur Phayre’s Collection of Burmese Manuscripts,” *British Library Journal* 1, 1975, p. 68. Except for a single inscription (Or 3434, f. *ca* verso) from Thitmahti area, Pagan (dated CS 618), the original stone inscriptions for these manuscripts still exist.

⁸¹ Twinthin Taikwun Mahasithu, *Yazawin-thit*, vol. 1, ed. by U Myint Swe, Yangon 1968, p. 2.

In 1885, the British conquered Upper Myanmar, merged it with Lower Myanmar, Arakan and Tenasserim, and made it a province of British India. The introduction of India's administrative structures meant, *inter alia*, that the Government Epigraphist for the Burma Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India, was now responsible for the whole province. The choice had fallen on Swiss Emil Forchhammer, who taught Oriental Languages (i.e. Pali and Sanskrit) at the Government College of Rangoon as his main profession.⁸² Forchhammer began to study and translate the inscriptions collected at Amarapura and Mandalay with the plan to prepare a complete edition of Burmese inscriptions. When he died prematurely in 1890, two volumes of edited inscriptions were ready for publication,⁸³ and his former secretary U Tun Nyein prepared another volume with the translations Forchhammer had left behind.⁸⁴ The editorial project was continued Taw Sein Ko, a Sino-Burmese who had served the British government in various capacities before being appointed Government Archaeologist in 1899.⁸⁵ Under his supervision four more volumes of old Burmese inscriptions were published.⁸⁶ Charles Duroiselle, who had become head of the Archaeological Survey of Burma in 1919,⁸⁷ brought the first phase of the 'colonial epigraphic project' to a close by compiling a chronologically arranged list of inscriptions with a brief summary of the content and other details of each inscription edited so far.⁸⁸ As a pioneering project, these early editions have both merits and defects. Most importantly, they provide a full reading of all inscriptions known by the early 20th century, which in a few instances where the stones are now lost means that they provide the only reading available. On the other hand, their usefulness for the serious researcher is rather limited for two main reasons. First, modern spellings were used in the transcriptions, making it virtually impossible to draw on language or spellings to assess the age and originality of an inscription. As

⁸² The family originally hailed from Kiel in Northern Germany, but Forchhammer's father went to Switzerland as a preacher and took on Swiss citizenship. Forchhammer began his career in medicine before venturing into Oriental languages at Leipzig University. For a critical assessment of Forchhammer, see Andrew Huxley, "Mon Studies and Professor Forchhammer: The Admiration that Destroys," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 162, 2012, p. 391–410.

⁸³ Archaeological Survey of Burma (ed.), *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, Rangoon 1892, and Archaeological Survey of Burma (ed.), *Inscriptions copied from stones collected by king Bodawpaya and placed near the Aracan Pagoda*, 2 vols., Rangoon 1897.

⁸⁴ U Tun Nyein (tr.), *Inscriptions from Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, Rangoon 1893.

⁸⁵ After Forchhammer's death, the post remained vacant until Taw Sein Ko's appointment, which went along with a reorganization of the department. For information on his person and career, see Taw Sein Ko, "The Career of Taw Sein Ko," in idem, *Burmese Sketches*, vol. 2, Rangoon 1921, p. 219–223. Also see Penny Edwards, "Relocating the Interlocutor: Taw Sein Ko (1864–1930) and the Itinerancy of Knowledge in British Burma," *Southeast Asia Research* 12 (3), 2004, p. 277–335.

⁸⁶ Archaeological Survey of Burma (ed.), *Inscriptions collected in Upper Burma*, 2 vols., Rangoon 1900–1903, and Archaeological Survey of Burma (ed.), *Original inscriptions collected by king Bodawpaya and placed near the Patodawgyi Pagoda, Amarapura*, Rangoon 1913.

⁸⁷ The establishment of the Burma branch of the ASI was a result of the Viceroy's visit to Burma in 1901. Lord Curzon, himself a connoisseur and collector of Asian art, wanted to strengthen the position of the ASI in response to the reported plundering of ancient sites in Burma, most notably Pagan. At the same time, he was also fully aware that mastery of a colony's history and art was an integral part of colonial dominance. Duroiselle had joined the India Office in 1904 and served as Assistant Superintendent for Epigraphy since 1912, which in effect meant that he was running the department as its director, Taw Sein Ko being on long-term leave until retirement in 1919. In December 1919, Duroiselle was appointed Superintendent of the ASB, from which office he retired in June 1931. Just before his final retirement, he took stock of the work of the ASB including its history, *RSASB 1937–38*, p. 18–26. For the official dates, see *India Office List 1933*, London 1933, p. 600–601.

⁸⁸ Charles Duroiselle, *A List of Inscriptions found in Burma*, vol. 1, Rangoon 1921. The intended second volume never materialized. A first step towards the *List* was the "Inventaire des inscriptions Palies, Sanskrites, Mon et Pyu de Birmanie," *BEFEO* 12, 1912, p. 19–34.

mentioned above, inscriptions were occasionally checked and sometimes rewritten, and originals and copies are hard to distinguish without the philological evidence. Second, and more importantly, the readings are not free from mistakes and/or printing errors. This refers not only to the names of places or persons (which are admittedly difficult to recognize in certain cases), but also to common words and phrases.⁸⁹ Consequentially, these volumes should only be used when there is no alternative.

3. Gordon H. Luce and U Pe Maung Tin

Incidentally, the publication of the last of these volumes coincided with the arrival of Gordon Hannington Luce at Rangoon, who joined Government College as a professor of English Literature.⁹⁰ The advent of Luce marked the beginning of a new phase in epigraphic research in Myanmar. Having become proficient in the Myanmar and other Oriental languages, Luce embarked upon studying early Myanmar language and history with emphasis on the Bagan period. Together with his brother-in-law U Pe Maung Tin,⁹¹ he first edited a volume with selections from the Bagan inscriptions⁹² and thereafter, between 1933 and 1959, the magnificent five-volume edition of “Inscriptions of Burma”, which contains photo-mechanic reproductions of Myanmar inscriptions up to the year 1364 CE.⁹³ Modelled after the *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam*,⁹⁴ these volumes are the ultimate point of reference for any study of early Myanmar epigraphy. In the first three volumes, inscriptions are arranged in a roughly chronological order, though the third volume also supplements inscriptions discovered while the project was under way, besides containing numerous undated or illegible fragments. Due to the ruptures caused by the war, the project could be completed only in 1956 with two more volumes, which take the collection to the year 1364, but also provide newly-found inscriptions, fragments, as well as addenda bearing earlier dates, and also inscriptions in languages other than Myanmar.

Besides doing the editorial groundwork, Luce published numerous articles on aspects of early Myanmar history and edited or translated a number of inscriptions individually or in cooperation. His research also informed the PhD thesis of U Than Tun on the religion of early Myanmar, submitted to the University of London in 1955. This dissertation abounds in lengthy extracts and translations from epigraphy of Bagan, and the printed version was given a detailed index for names and vocabulary.⁹⁵ Another outcome of epigraphic research at Rangoon University was the selection of inscriptions compiled by U E Maung, then Professor of Myanmar Language. The book’s lengthy introduction on the peculiarities and grammar of

⁸⁹ Cp. Duroiselle, *List*, p. IV.

⁹⁰ For an assessment of Luce’s life and work, see Hugh Tinker, “The Place of G. H. Luce in Research and Education in Burma during the last Decade of British Rule,” *JRAS* 1986, p. 174-190, as well as U Tin Htway, “Burmese Epigraphy: G. H. Luce’s Legacy yet to be Unearthed,” *Aséanie* 7, 2001, p. 35-58.

⁹¹ Information on U Pe Maung Tin can be found in the several volumes compiled in connection with his 100th anniversary in 1988 (which however was delayed by a decade due to the political circumstances). See U Thaw Kaung (ed.), *U Pe Maung Tin: A Tribute*, Yangon 1999 (papers from a symposium held at Yangon in 1998) and the special issue of the *Journal of Burma Studies* 9, 2004, which contains a selection of the papers presented on a conference in London in 1998.

⁹² Gordon H. Luce/U Pe Maung Tin (eds.), *Selections from the Inscriptions of Pagan*, Rangoon 1928.

⁹³ Gordon H. Luce/U Pe Maung Tin (eds.), *Inscriptions of Burma*, 5 vols., Rangoon/Oxford 1933-1956.

⁹⁴ Georges Coedès (ed.), *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam*, 2 vol., Bangkok 1924-1929.

⁹⁵ U Than Tun, *The Buddhist Church in Burma, c. 1050-1300 AD*, London (Diss. Phil.) 1955. It was printed in 1976 under the title “History of Buddhism in Burma, AD 1000- 1300” as vol. 61 of the *JBRIS*.

early Myanmar language and a focus on early inscriptions indicate that U E Maung designed it to become a textbook for language classes.⁹⁶

The *Inscriptions of Burma* are the ultimate source book for the history of early Burma and a first-hand reference for the epigrapher. However, it has to be kept in mind that the little more than 600 inscriptions selected for the portfolios represent just a part of the inscriptions known from the period, as Luce and U Pe Maung Tin disregarded for their compilation all inscriptions not deemed original. They achieved this aim with remarkable accuracy, allowing only for very few doubtful cases. List 133, for instance, from king Narapati's Sulamani temple (1183 CE), was omitted because it has another inscription on its reverse in the same hand but dating from the 14th century. In contrast, Pl. IV 574 was considered original although certain spellings suggest a date later than the year it states, 1179 CE. With the gift of hindsight, seeing the sandstone deteriorate and the ink inscriptions fall off the walls,⁹⁷ one would have preferred the editors take a less rigid approach, but then again one must not overlook the size of their task nor the cost such a huge project may have incurred.

The *Burma Historical Commission*, founded in 1955, made the study of inscriptions one of its central objects. Under its auspices, Luce and U Pe Maung Tin began to prepare standard editions of the inscriptions, consisting of a re-print of the rubbings, transliteration of the texts (in Roman script), translation and explanation. Starting with the Shwegu-gyi inscription (Pl. I 1-2), the project reached up to Pl. I 20 (king Narapatisithu's Dhammayazika inscription) when it had to be abandoned published due to the political change in 1962.⁹⁸ Luce was forced to leave Myanmar in 1964 under humiliating terms (his library, notes and index cards were restored to him only years later), and with his departure and the arrested activities of the Burma Historical Commission research in epigraphy came to a temporary halt.

4. "Nationalist" Research and the Archaeology Department

The 1960s were thus an important watershed in the history of epigraphic research in Myanmar, as earlier projects had been concluded (the *Inscriptions of Burma*) or were abandoned (the edition prepared by the Burma Historical Commission). At the same time, new inscriptions continued to turn up, and ultimately the need was felt to compile a new, fuller corpus of Myanmar inscriptions. This project, which was pursued by the Archaeology Department under its Director-General U Aung Thaw and the readings being produced by U Nyein Maung, resulted in the five volumes of *She-haung Myanmar Kyauksa-mya* ("Old Myanmar Inscriptions"). In a roughly chronological arrangements, the first three volumes cover the period up to the early 14th century, while the remaining two contain inscriptions up to the late 17th century.⁹⁹ The edition presents a plain transcription without annotations or

⁹⁶ U E Maung (comp.), *Selections from the Inscriptions of Pagan*, Rangoon 1958. The major difference between U E Maung's work and the preceding one is that the new selection has the full text whereas Luce and U Pe Maung Tin concentrated on the first part with the date, the name of the donor and his introductory remarks, but omitted the rest of the inscriptions.

⁹⁷ Two prominent examples are Pl. III 308-310, a four-sided pillar inscription inside the Shwegoncha temple, which has lost about a quarter of the text due to the sand stone peeling off at the bottom, and Pl. IV 372, an ink inscription inside Yatsauk temple, which has mostly disappeared now.

⁹⁸ When the BHC was (temporarily) dissolved in 1963, the third issue of its Bulletin had been printed but was never distributed. Only very few copies have survived.

⁹⁹ Department of Archaeology (ed.), *She-haung Myanmar Kyauksa-mya*, vol. 1, comp. by U Aung Thaw and U Nyein Maung, Yangon 1972, vol. 2, comp. by U Nyein Maung, Yangon 1983, vol. 3, Yangon 1984, vols. 4-5, Yangon 1998. A sixth volume was completed in 1998 but remained unpublished.

explanations, save for a few notes concerning vocabulary. The volumes are hand-written and mimeographed, which allowed to retain original spellings and at the same time minimised the risk of misprints. Emphasis was put on original inscriptions though a good number of non-original but presumed reliable inscriptions have been taken into account under separate headings. For instance, the full text of king Narapatisithu's Sulamani inscription is included in the first volume among other inscriptions of the same kind. The second volume has one section with several inscriptions discovered since the publication of the first volume and another appendix with fragmentary and undated inscriptions.

Without doubt, the volumes provide the most complete and comprehensive collection of Myanmar inscriptions available. That said, they also have their obvious shortcomings. Firstly, they are still incomplete. This refers not only to inscriptions never properly recorded,¹⁰⁰ but surprisingly also to inscriptions the rubbings of which are included in the volumes of the *Inscriptions of Burma*.¹⁰¹ Secondly, the readings occasionally overstress what appears to be legible line by line instead of putting difficult portions in the context of the rest of the text. An example is the inscription from the Shwegoncha temple at Bagan. *She-haung* suggest the figure (5)85 CS (or 1243 CE) for its date, which is indeed difficult to read.¹⁰² However, the phrase in translating the date says that "the religion had reached the year so-and-so" (*thathana la-thaw*), which must refer to a date in the Buddhist era. Commencing in 544 BCE, this calendar consisted of four digits in the Bagan period, rendering (17)85 or 1241 CE as the most likely date. This improved reading does not make a huge difference, but still the mistake could have been easily avoided.

Related to this is the third shortcoming: The readings of *She-haung* are unsystematic not only in regard of the information gained from each inscription individually, but also and much more so with regard to each other. There is no proper crosschecking or comparison. A good example to illustrate this is Pl. II 152. It records a dedication of serfs which the donors had received from an anonymous lady, who is identified as the "wife of Sin-kyay and daughter of ...", her father's name being left blank as illegible (l. 11). Yet the missing name can be easily restored with the help of Pl. 140a where the same lady is referred to as "wife of Sin-kyay and daughter of Phyinsa" (l. 5). Again, further examples could be cited, but it may suffice here to say that as a general rule, the readings in *She-haung* present what the editor found legible or intelligible on the rubbing in front of him, but little more. This critique of the edition is admittedly quite rigorous, and one should hasten to add that faults of the type quoted above are exceptional. At least 90 per cent of the work – comprising of almost 800 inscriptions and more than 1300 pages of text – are correct and reliable. But exactly because of the high quality of the *She-haung* edition in general and the reputation it has gained among scholars for its high standards, a word of caution does not seem out of place here.

In recent years, various institutions in Myanmar have taken up editorial work on inscriptions again. The collection of 18th century copies at the Mandalay Mahamuni temple has been

¹⁰⁰ A notable example is a fragmentary inscription from the Nandamanya temple in Pagan discovered in the late 1950s. A picture of the stone was published by U Maung Maung Tin in an article for the *Myawati* magazine (March 1959, p. 40), as part of his report on the visit to Bagan. The inscription, still in the porch of the temple, is clearly original, but has never been mentioned by anyone apart from U Maung Maung Tin.

¹⁰¹ The two cases are Pl. I 9b and Pl. I 105b. A preliminary check of vol. 4 has shown that at least ten inscriptions previously published in the IB are missing.

¹⁰² Pl. III 308, l. 11. This reading was used for the dating of the temple, see Pierre Pichard, *The Pentagonal Monuments of Pagan*, Bangkok 1991, p. 42 and 144.

published in four volumes (a fifth volume was prepared for publication in 2013), and a second project has begun survey the two large collections of inscription stones kept inside compound of Mandalay Palace and at the Htupayon stupa in Sagaing. Both works provide reproductions of the rubbings together with a type-set reading of each inscription.¹⁰³ They represent a major advance in research, as neither of the two collections has ever been properly catalogued (let alone studied), but regrettably the rubbings are too small and too poorly reproduced to allow the critical examination of the readings. Besides, the new *Myanmar Historical Research Journal* has provided a platform for several studies of individual inscriptions.

Since the late 1980s, the excavations and renovations carried out at Bagan and other important places of the Bagan period such as Sale have continued to yield new inscriptions year by year.¹⁰⁴ It is therefore difficult to state how many inscriptions from the Bagan (or any other) period are currently known. As mentioned above, an ongoing project to list and catalogue inscriptions written before 1300 CE contains some 750 entries, of which approx. 60-70 have come to light during the past twenty years alone. The latter is an impressive number, but more than that, some of new finds are also important for their contents. Among these are the multilingual “Saw Lu” inscription from Myittha (Kyaukse Distr.), which is dated 415 (1053 CE) and contains passages in Sanskrit, Pali, Mon and Pyu,¹⁰⁵ and the inscription of queen Durga Mahadevi, dated 1129 CE, which represents the latest example for the use on Old Mon in a Pagan epigraph.¹⁰⁶ Two almost equally old inscription have come from sites near Thabyinnyu temple and the Shwenanyindaw complex southeast of Bagan’s city walls. The former dates from the reign of a king styled Sri Tribhuvanadityapavaradhammaraja, a title taken by king Alaungsithu (c. 1112-1168 CE),¹⁰⁷ and records the dedications a court official (*thin-gyi*), Bo-min Nyaung-chan made during his long life of 84 years. The latter has no legible date but belongs to the 12th century as well on palaeographic evidence. It contains the names of two kings, king Sithu and another one ending with *-singha*. This inscription may help to shed fresh light on the royal genealogy in 12th century Pagan, which is still a matter of controversy.¹⁰⁸

Interestingly, some of the newly-found inscriptions were already known, though only through their copies kept at Mandalay. One such case is an inscription found at the Hsinpyushin complex. Dated 607 ME, it records the donations of a king and a prince (or princess) Min Hla to the mahathera of the monastery. The text of this inscription has been included in several later copies under various dates.¹⁰⁹ A more striking example records donation of a whole library by a certain Singhavirsurjjapuir to a religious institution. Providing full titles of the

¹⁰³ *Htupayon Kyauksa*, ed. by Archaeology Department, National Museum Dept. and Literature Council, 2 vols., Yangon 2009-2010; *Mandalay Nan-twin Kyauksa*, ed. by Archaeology Department, National Museum and Literature Council, 2 vols., Yangon 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Two newly discovered inscriptions were shown to me at Sale in January 2005. One of them records a lawsuit decided in the year 1222 CE. Another almost illegible inscription, probably from the early 13th century and discovered near Kyaukse, has been brought to my attention by the French archaeologist Ernelle Berliet. Those inscriptions from Bagan placed at the Bagan Museum are catalogued by U Myint Hswe, *Bagan She-haung Thutethana Pyadaik*, Yangon, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Reference. The inscription was brought to my attention too late to allow more than a cursory study.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. the article by Christian Bauer in this volume.

¹⁰⁷ For the regnal titles of the Pagan kings, see the table attached to Luce, *Old Burma*, vol. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Tilman Frasch, “The Mt. Thetso Inscription re-examined,” *MHRJ* 2, 1998, p. 109-126; U Tun Aung Chain, “The earlier Kings of Bagan Dynasty – 70 years later,” *MHRJ* 10, 2002, p. 1-30.

¹⁰⁹ List 1 = B 2, p. 833 = MM no. 4, p. 25.

texts and scriptures donated, this inscription is of invaluable importance for scholars of the history and literature of Theravada Buddhism.¹¹⁰

To conclude this section on epigraphic research in Myanmar, a few research aids should finally be mentioned. U E Maung's selection has a long introduction on Old Myanmar language and the way it developed into modern Myanmar. The Ministry of Education commissioned a small booklet with the Burmese alphabet as found in inscriptions of various periods. Appended to the volume are the rubbings of a few selected inscriptions.¹¹¹ The latest works to deserve mention are encyclopedias again. U Myat Kyaw, a free-lance scholar, has compiled a dictionary with the vocabulary from the Pagan inscriptions, which relies heavily on the OBI-edition,¹¹² and U Thein Hlaing, professor of Myanmar Language at Yangon University, edited a research dictionary on the Pagan period, which is broader in scope than the above-mentioned wordlist.¹¹³ The Language Commission under the Ministry of Education published a "Wordlist" for the Pagan and Pinya periods,¹¹⁴ which gives long extracts from the inscriptions containing the words selected, and Tin Naing To wrote a "Dictionary of Pagan", which has entries on kings, temples and events.¹¹⁵

IV. Tasks for future research

It will have become clear by now that even after more than a century of research, the epigraphy of early Burma still promises to yield important results, not only in the fields of history and philology, but also for the scholars of religion, society and culture. However, the state in which the inscriptions are available at present makes it rather difficult to use them to the full. Some remarks and suggestions regarding the direction and objects of future research on Burmese epigraphy shall therefore conclude this article.

The first and probably most urgent task is the compilation of a revised and updated "List of Inscriptions" to take stock of the amount of inscriptions currently known. Building upon its predecessor, this list should contain all relevant data such as dates, place of origin, main person or donor, present location and references to editions and translations as far as they are available.¹¹⁶ For all practical reasons, this should become an online database, which will not only guarantee its accessibility, but also the possibility of updates whenever new finds are reported. This project can be extended by the publication of the rubbings (or maybe the stones, if pictures taken from them allow a reading¹¹⁷) of all inscriptions that were not

¹¹⁰ List 187-188 = B 2, p. 789. For its reading and translation see U Than Tun, "An original inscription dated 10 September 1223 that King Badon copied on 27 October 1785," in *Études birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot*, réunis par Pierre Pichard et François Robinne, Paris 1998, p. 37-55. With two copies already at Amarapura, the inscription apparently provides another example of copies on stone being transported across the country, perhaps as part of U Tun Nyo's survey in the late 18th century.

¹¹¹ Ministry of Education (ed.), *Pagan, Ava, Konbaung Kyauk-twin Myanma-ekkaya-pon*, Yangon 1979.

¹¹² U Myat Kyaw, *Bagan-khet Myanma Kyauk-sa Abhidhan*, Yangon 2001.

¹¹³ U Thein Hlaing, *Khet-haung Myanma-thamaing Thutethana Abhidhan*, Yangon (2nd ed.) 2002.

¹¹⁴ Min. of Education, Dept. of Myanmar Language (ed.), *Sa-go Abhidhan (Pagan-khet, Pinya-khet)* (Dictionary of words, Pagan-Pinya period), Yangon 2009.

¹¹⁵ Tin Hlaing To, *Bagan Abhidhan* (Dictionary of Pagan), Yangon, 2009.

¹¹⁶ For first steps towards this aim, see Tilman Frasch, "Inscriptions from Bagan, edited and translated," in *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Myanmar Historical Commission*, ed. Ministry of Education, Yangon 2005, p. 134-148; and, for a more general survey, the sections on Myanmar in Arlo Griffiths and D. Christian Lammerts, "Epigraphy: Southeast Asia," *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Jonathan Silk, vol.1, Leiden: Brill, 2015, p. 988-1009.

¹¹⁷ In 2013, the Archaeology Department completed a digital photographic record of the collection at Mandalay.

considered for the *Inscriptions of Burma*. As indicated above, practically no estampages have been published since the last volume of the portfolios was printed in 1956, and the few that were are practically useless. Again, publishing online could both accelerate the work and help mitigate costs..

Finally, comprehensive and critical edition of the inscriptions, with proper readings, translations and annotations. As described above, the proper editing and especially translating of the Pagan inscriptions as begun by Luce and U Pe Maung Tin in the late 1950s stopped before it had really started, referring scholars unable to read sources in the Myanmar language to any translation that is available, irrespective of its quality (this sentence is not clear). As pointed out above, such translations are often beset with misspellings and mistakes that, in some cases, survived in academic literature for more than a century.¹¹⁸ In fact, one of the works often regarded as a standard history of Pagan, is especially weak in dealing with the sources, both repeating old mistakes and producing new ones.¹¹⁹ A standard edition following the model set by Luce and U Pe Maung Tin would not only put an end to quoting from unreliable sources, but would also enable a wider body of scholars to make use of the early Burmese epigraphs for their own research and teaching.

Finally, inscriptions do not stand separately, but are part of a social, political and religious context. They are parts of ceremonies, and gain relevance in connection with human beliefs and acts of piety, they are related to works of art and architecture. This holds true for temple constructions no less than for the Pyu reliquaries, as described above. It is therefore important to study epigraphs in connection with the events – the construction of religious monuments or the conduct of a religious ceremony – for which they were written. True enough, only few inscriptions have survived the successive surveys on their original locations, but occasionally architectural and artifactual evidence can be related to the record on stone. As the architectural monuments of Pagan have been documented and studied in a magnificent manner,¹²⁰ the ground is prepared for a similar comprehensive study of the early epigraphy of Myanmar.

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¹¹⁸ See Tilman Frasch, “Inscriptions of Burma, edited and translated,” in *Myanmar Historical Commission Golden Jubilee Volume*, Yangon 2005, p. 134-148.

¹¹⁹ Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan. The Origins of modern Burma*, Honolulu 1985. Notable cases are the “lord of Pegu” (or “Bago-min”) or the “death register”. See Tilman Frasch, *Pagan. Stadt und Staat*, Stuttgart 1996, passim.

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Abbreviations

AA Artibus Asiae

BBHC	Bulletin of the Burma Historical Commission
BEFEO	Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
CE	Common Era
EI	Epigraphia Indica
IMP	(Pierre Pichard) Inventory of the Monuments at Pagan
JA	Journal Asiatique
JBRS	Journal of the Burma Research Society
JBS _t	Journal of Burma Studies
JPTS	Journal of the Pali Text Society
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
List	(Charles Duroiselle) A List of Inscriptions Found in Burma
ME	Myanmar Era
MHRJ	Myanmar Historical Research Journal
RSASB	Report of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey of Burma